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UNCLAS ANKARA 000959

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR G/TIP, G, INL, DRL, EUR/PGI, EUR/SE

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SUBJECT: PRESSING TURKISH MFA ON TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

REF: ANKARA 127

1. (U) Jan. 27 Polcouns and Poloff paid introductory call Haldun Otman, newly-appointed MFA Deputy Director General of Consular Affairs, to press the GOT to follow through on recent efforts to combat trafficking in persons (TIP). Polcouns noted that the USG last year upgraded Turkey from Tier III to Tier II in the annual TIP Report based on a number of late GOT initiatives. The GOT must follow up on these initiatives in order to maintain progress against TIP and remain in Tier II. A return to Tier III could trigger USG economic sanctions. Polcouns noted that the GOT in September 2003 signed an anti-TIP protocol with the Human Resources Development Foundation (HRDF), an Istanbul-based NGO, that included shelters, a voluntary repatriation program, and training. MFA officials have explained to the Embassy (reftel) that neither the GOT nor HRDF have been able to secure funding for the protocol, but the GOT needs to find a way to begin implementing it. In addition, the USG this year will need detailed information about arrests, prosecutions, and sentencing in TIP-related trials.

2. (U) Otman replied that the GOT takes TIP seriously and is working to expand its efforts to combat trafficking. Noting that the USG re-evaluated Turkey and upgraded it to Tier II recently -- in September 2003 -- Otman averred that the GOT needs time to implement the latest anti-TIP initiatives. For example, GOT officials are currently examining options for opening a shelter for TIP victims.

3. (U) Poloff noted that the International Organization for Migration (IOM) recently submitted to the GOT a USD 1.2 million pilot project that would include shelters, training, and a voluntary repatriation program. IOM is seeking international donors for the plan. The project would allow the GOT to move forward on the commitments of the protocol it signed with HRDF. Otman said the GOT is reviewing the IOM proposal, but needs to resolve a number of issues before deciding whether to proceed. For example, some elements of the GOT question why IOM insists that its staff accompany voluntary returnees all the way to the airplane. Poloff said this is consistent with IOM procedures worldwide; IOM must accompany returnees to ensure the returns are voluntary. Otman said MFA is verifying whether other countries allow IOM such access. MFA supports the IOM project, but needs more information in order to convince other ministries.

EDELMAN